DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 345 901 RC 018 676

AUTHOR Warner, Linda Sue
TITLE Matriarchal Decision-Making.
PUB DATE Mar 92
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the "Colors of the Heart" Conference of the National Association for Women in Education (San Antonio, TX, March 4-7, 1992).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS American Indian Culture; *American Indians; *Cognitive Dissonance; Cultural Influences; *Decision Making; Higher Education; Racial Bias; Sex Bias; *Sex Role; Supervisors; *Women Administrators
IDENTIFIERS Matriarchy

ABSTRACT

In contrast to European cultures, many American Indian societies have been matriarchal. Indian women have had a great deal of power, both as individuals and as groups, and have held various leadership roles within their tribes. Traditionally, Indian women have worked in partnership with men, and decision-making has been related to consensus building. This paper examines decision-making situations that produced cognitive dissonance for six American Indian women supervisors in higher education. Data were collected by personal interviews with the women. They were 38-55 years old and had been supervisors in educational settings for 15-30 years. Decisionmaking situations that produced dissonance were of two types. Decisions between completely negative alternatives included performance evaluation decisions, decisions that provoked an emotional reaction from employees, and personnel decisions that involved counseling or reprimanding elders. Decisions between alternatives, each of which had both positive and negative aspects, included acting as a role model for young people, decisions involving task orientation and deadlines, and decisions that resulted from gender-stereotyped duties. The women were familiar with traditional methods of matriarchal decisions, including personal reflection. The findings illustrate that: (1) sex-role stereotypes have more of an impact on dissonance than ethnic stereotypes; and (2) there is a cultural reinforcement of decision-making skills that mirrors reflective practice. (SV)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED345001

Matriarchal Decision-Making

Linda Sue Warner
University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Linda Sue Warner

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Paper presented at the Colors of the Heart Confernce
National Association for Women in Education
SanAntonio, TX: March 4 -7 1992

RUNNING HEAD: Decision Making

RC 018676

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Abstract

Based on Festinger's (1957) theory of cognitive dissonance, this study evaluated decision-making by American Indian women supervisors in a higher education setting. Using an ethnographic perspective, the reseacher identified themes which were predominant in their experiences. These themes were discussed in terms of cultural traditions and future implications for reflective decision-making and consensus building.

Matriarchal Decision Making

In education, the concept of feminist administration can be considered fairly new. Regan (1990) offers a definition of feminist administering through parallels with feminist pedagogy and makes suggestions about the application of this concept to the restructuring movement in schools. Haring-Hidore and others (1990) examined decision-making by women administrators in higher education settings. They concluded that female administrators' ways of knowing affected their leadership and decision-making skills. They centered their study around four bases of knowledge, e. g. received; subjective; procedural; and constructed and how feminist administration impacted those bases. Further, they found that decision-making by women was practiced as reflective thinking and that the need for reflective practice in all areas of decision-making could be enhanced.

While the discussions about the need to consider gender differences in patterns of intellectual development (Stonewater, 1989) have been persuasive in their conclusions, particularly as they relate to decision-making, the discussions have remained centered in one cultural perspective.

Cultural Values and Decision Making

Decision-making within the context of culture requires that one recognize the external influence that culture has on individuals. Most often, the culture and the discussions which result deal with the influence men have in the world of work for women. Most women recognize and experience this fact. The culture(s) of American Indian women often differ radically from an Anglo-American world view. In linking American Indian women to a culture, it is important to understand the concept of world view. According to a Tewa anthropologist, "world view provides a distinctive set of values, an identity, a feeling of rootedness, of belonging to a time and place, and a felt sense of continuity with a tradition that transcends the experience of a single lifetime, a tradition which may be said to transcend even time" (Ortiz, 1977: 591).

American Indian women are members of a family-oriented tribal society which is affected by group-held values, beliefs and

behaviors. The effects of these on individual behavior is often under-estimated. The effects of various American Indian cultures are most likely indiscernible to those individuals who operate within the culture.

Most non Indians, too, are unaware of the differences in world view of many indigenous cultures from that of the Anglo view. It is, however, this differing world view which underlies the discussion of matriarchal decision making from two distinct perspectives: 1) rethinking historical reports, and 2) current practices.

The discussion which follows then is, of necessity, one which has generalized the common cultural perspectives of the approximately 500 tribal communities in this country. This generalization is not impossible, nor is it indefensible. There are several values which Indian authors, researchers and leaders have reiterated and these values, then, provide a common vocabulary for contrast and comparison with other cultures.

Most of the values, beliefs, or behavior patterns represented as traditionally American Indian were more evident in historical accounts than they are in contemporary representations. American Indian/Alaskan Native beliefs, values, behaviors continue to be influenced by mainstream America. In a discussion of cultural values, it is appropriate to conceptualize a continuum from strict traditional lifestyle to assimilation. Obviously, most Indians are somewhere between these two. Many examples in the research indicate that most American Indian women, do not feel a need to feel to assimilate in order to provide leadership or make decisions within their own community.

Indian Women Leaders

Central to the world view shared by most American Indian women are the following values (Verble and Walton, 1983): balance; assertiveness; language; cooperation; group emphasis; non-materialism; modesty; personal reserve; time flowing; present tense. These values are reflected in observations of matriarchal decision making. These values are also reflected in consensus building. Decisions which are made using these values mirror reflective thinking strategies.

Traditions

In a patriarchal culture, women were considered little more than property and were totally dependent upon men for their livelihood. Using these experiences, early Europeans attempted to interpret Indian cultures and male/female roles within those cultures. They assumed that Indian women were subservient Without a recognition and understanding of unique histories, customs and cultures, Europeans tended to monoculturize Indian nations and this tendency continues (Buller, 1982; O'Neill, 1987).

Contrary to this interpretation of historical accounts of American Indian women, it is widely believed today, after much reassessment, that many Indian societies were and still continue to be matrilineal. In matrilineal descent, power is transferred through one's mother. For a culture to be considered matrifocal, the mother role is viewed as valued and structurally central to the society. In a matri-local culture, the daughter takes the husband to live at her mother's home. In all three, Indian women as individuals and groups had a great deal of power and held various leadership roles within the tribe. The actual work of the society was divided, however, both men's labor and women's labor was valued and required for survival (Niethammer, 1977).

Understandably, early male explorers valued their own cultural perspective and it was nearly incomprehensible to them that a differing world view was/or could have been/ at work. One clear example of this misunderstanding can be seen in observations of Louis H. Morgan which he made about the Iroquois. "The Indian regarded women as the inferior, the dependent, and the servant of man. And in her nature and habit, she actually considered herself to be so" (Bentz, 1982). Historians now recognize the inaccuracy of such statements.

Studies of Iroquois women have shown that they were able to reach the zenith of power in a native society. Iroquois women selected and removed council members of the confederation, as well as, held a large number of formal positions. This facet of culture proved to be a major problem in non-Indian relations with the Iroquois. Anglo men, because of this misunderstanding, often made

treaty decisions with groups of men who did not have the traditional authority to enter into such agreements. Without the approval of the culturally based decision-making group, the treaties were inappropriately used.

Decision-making in Indian country has been defined primarily by the function. In Indian cultures traditionally there were chiefs, clan leaders, war leaders, spiritual leaders and diplomats. Decision-making was based on the ability to represent the attitudes and values of the tribal members and was frequently related to consensus building.

Matriarchal decision-making as represented by American Indian cultures can be defined as representative and participative. Functionally, it is consensus decision-making. Traditionally, Indian women have worked in a partnership role with the men (Piper ,1983). Consensus building is a slow process. In earlier times, the objectives of this decision-making was fundamentally tribal survival. Current decision-making had moved the survival to a political, rather than a physical level.

For Janine Pease Windy Boy (Crow) (1983), decision-making is essentially the traditional "vision quest". She noted that tribal histories include leaders who used "dream power" in their decision-making. Her role modeling, as President of Big Horn College , has established consensus building in contemporary, political terms. It is further augmented by the increasing number of women who are being elected to positions within tribal governments across the country.

In studying contemporary decision-making by American Indian women, this research used evidence of cognitive dissonance for the analyses of the theoretical framework. Cognitive dissonance had provided the basis for previous descriptive research studies on the correlation of ethnic and sex-role stereotyping to job satisfaction for American Indian women (Warner, 1989; Warner & Seaberg, 1990) For this analysis, cognitive dissonance was linked to decision-making. Decision making as reflective practice, or consensus, provided insight into a cultural framework which included assimilation.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study was based on the work of Festinger's (1957) early analysis of cognitive dissonance. This conceptual analysis served as the basis for discussion of the perceptions of the themes documented from the notes and interviews. Festinger's (1957) hypothesis of dissonance avoidance proposed that pressure to reduce dissonance appeared as soon as the dissonance was manifested. Individuals changed cognitions about behaviors by changing actions, or by changing knowledge about behaviors. Dissonance could arise because of cultural mores. The dissonance existed because the culture defined what was consonant and what was not.

The components of the theory of dissonance avoidance included those actions which resulted from decision-making. The pressure to reduce dissonance can be seen after a decision has been made. Festinger's theory also included hypotheses on specific determinants of the magnitude of dissonance. He proposed the following situations in which a decision produced dissonance:

1. Decisions between completely negative alternatives.
2. Decisions between alternatives, each having both positive and negative aspects.
3. Decisions involving more than two alternatives.

The more important the decision being made, the stronger the dissonance created by the choice. The variable of importance was the general measure of the magnitude of dissonance.

Objectives

This study was designed to investigate themes which produced dissonance from decision-making for American Indian women supervisors in higher education. The study attempted to categorize those themes that were related to decision-making. Thus, the first question was: Are there decision-making experiences which produce dissonance for this population? Assuming there are such experiences, it should be possible to determine the circumstances common to those experiences. The second question was: In instances where dissonance in decision-making occurs, are there differentiated characteristics associated with gender. Once the

characteristics associated with dissonance in decision-making were described, the themes of those characteristics represented could be assessed.

Population

The population used for this study included six American Indian female supervisors with experience in post-secondary educational management. The ages of the women ranged from thirty-eight to fifty-five. The women had served as supervisors in educational settings ranging from fifteen years to thirty years. All of the women held a Master's degree; two individuals had doctorates. The management experience at a post-secondary institution in a decision-making role ranged from less than six months to eight years. Three of the individuals were new to this organization or their position in it within the last year. While the leadership at this institution had provided opportunity for female mangers, the organizational management remained sixty-six per cent Indian male. The entire institution was approximately sixty per cent male and forty per cent female (N = 140).

Methodology

The methodology used for this study was qualitative. The observations and notes were confined, for the purpose of this study, to American Indian women and their decision-making role in administrative positions in post-secondary institutions. The data were collected systematically during series interviews with time periods which did not exceed fifty minutes each.

The language of the field notes included references to the federal government with specific, descriptive terminology identifying American Indian relationships. Notes were taped and transcribed in order to make a verbatim record of the events. The data were analyzed and reconfigured in sets which included the following major categories: attribution; strict inclusion; function; means/end; sequence; cause/effect; rationale; location for action (Spradley, 1979) The data set was analyzed for themes. Only those data which were associated with matriarchal decision-making was reported in this study, therefore, the only theme discussed in the following analysis is that of Role.

Cultural Role and Decision-Making

Data collected from the interviews produced three themes; specifically, Organization, Morale, and Role. These three themes represented approximately 75 percent of the data collected. Data which dealt specifically with decision-making as a Role has been sorted into groups representing the three components of dissonance.

Component 1) Decision between completely negative alternatives (Festinger, 1957). For evidence of this component within the theme of Cultural Role, the sample indicated that the following were examples of negative alternatives. Decisions regarding performance evaluation were seen as an organizational requirement; however, they were viewed skeptically by individuals within the organization. Essentially, performance evaluation was perceived as being unfair, e.g., "if she likes me, I'll do well." Because this organizational mind set was common, it was perceived by this sample as being difficult to reorient individuals to the positive, career and self-enhancement opportunities that performance evaluation might offer.

Another set of decisions which were perceived as having only negative alternatives were those decisions which evoked or provoked an emotional reaction from employees. Usually these reactions were from females, but they were not exclusive to female employees.

Finally, those personnel decisions which involved counseling or reprimanding elders, especially male elders provided the most dissonance. These activities were described by everyone in the sample and the configuration of the organization was viewed as requiring this type of activity. Yet each of the women struggled with this task as it was the one most discordant with beliefs and values taught to them as members of an Indian community.

Component 2) Decisions between positive and negative alternatives (Festinger, 1957). For this sample, those decisions which can be viewed as having positive alternatives and negative alternatives range from decisions on aspects of role-modeling to decisions which were a result of others' perceptions of gender roles. In efforts to role-model for young people, it was evident that the

sample felt that this was important and that it had positive impact on young people, yet, in spite of the results, most of them were not comfortable being viewed as a role-model. Role modeling requires that one move into a position outside of the majority. The reluctance to set ones' self up as a role-model can be seen as a reflection of the culture, yet, its necessity, particularly for educators, was not questioned.

Decisions within the college organizational structure were also seen as having both positive and negative effects. For example, the collegiate atmosphere allowed for flexibility regarding time. Time flowing was one of the values described as related to their culture, and yet, it was often necessary to be task-oriented and to require deadlines in order for the bureaucracy to work successfully.

Finally, those decisions which were made as a result of being assigned gender stereotyped duties combined negative and positive aspects. Often these women felt that they were moved into positions by virtue of the other managers' gender stereotyping, yet, once in the position they were able to effect change. The opportunity to make decisions then was a result of a mistyped assignment within the managerial team which was predominantly male.

Component 3) Decisions involving more than two alternatives (Festinger, 1957). For this component, there was no data generated in this study. This may suggest that components of cognitive dissonance was primarily based on a culture specific understanding of dissonance. In summarizing the data, one individual indicated that the frustrations with decision-making often made her wonder why she chose to be a supervisor and concluded that most of the really smart women she knew were too smart to be "official" leaders. For each of the women, the association with traditional methods of matriarchal decision making was familiar and included personal reflections.

Using the theoretical framework which postulated that the presence of dissonance gave rise to pressures to review or eliminate the dissonance, it can be asserted that the strength of the pressures to reduce dissonance was a function of the magnitude of the dissonance. Some dissonance experienced by these women would be

reduced as a result of shared social support for opinions, particularly as those opinions related to decision-making.

This research supported, for this population, that the impact of sex-role impacted individuals more significantly than concerns labeled as ethnic role or the "double bind". This is consistent with other findings for this population (Warner, 1989; Warner & Seaberg, 1990) which determined that sex role stereotyping appeared to be related to dissatisfaction, yet ethnic stereotyping did not have as strong a relationship.

Finally, the conclusions appear to support evidence of a cultural reinforcement of decision-making skills that mirrors reflective practice. While the sample used for this study did not include male American Indians in the interviews, the examples used in the study represent a partnership in management between American Indian men and women. Further research on decision-making and the cultural implications of decision-making in education is warranted.

References

Bentz, M. (1982). Combatting the "squaw syndrome". Paper presented at the Ohoyo Northwest Conference, Seattle, WA: June 23-26, 1982.

Buller, K. (1982). The "Y" Indian guide and the "Y" Indian princess programs. In Arlene B. Hirschfelder (Ed)., American Indian stereotypes in the world of children: A reader and bibliography. Metuchen, NJ: The Scarecrow Press.

Festinger, L. (1957). A theory of cognitive dissonance. Evaston, IL: Row, Peterson & Company.

Haring-Hidore, M. et al. (1990). Women administrators' ways of knowing. Education and Urban Society, 22 (2), 170-81.

Niethammer, C. (1977). Daughters of the earth: The lives and legends of American Indian women. New York: Collier Books.

O'Neill, P. (1987). The North American Indian in contemporary history and social studies textbooks. Journal of American Indian Education, 22-25.

Ortiz, A (1977) Look to the mountaintop. The Sacred: Ways of Knowledge, Sources of Life. Navajo Community College Press, Tsaile, AZ.

Piper, L. (1983). Assertiveness: Putting thoughts into action. Leadership: Theories and Skill Development. Washington, DC: Ohoyo.

Regan, H. B. (1990) Not for women only: School administration as a feminist activity. Teachers College Record, 91 (4), 565-77.

Spradley, J. P. (1979). The ethnographic interview. Ft. Worth: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, Inc.

Stonewater, B. B. (1989). Gender differences in career decision-making: A theoretical integration. Initiatives, 54 (1) 27-34.

Verble, S. D. & Walton, M. F. (1983). Ohoyo training manual, Washington, DC: U. S. Government Printing Office.

Warner, L. S., and Seaberg, J. J. (1990, April). Stereotyping and job satisfaction among American Indian female supervisors. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Division A, Boston, MA.

Warner, L. S. (1989). Stereotyping and job satisfaction among American Indian women supervisors. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Oklahoma, Norman.

Windy Boy, J. P. (1983). Decision-making: The vision quest. Leadership: Theories and Skill Development. Washington, DC: Ohoyo.